



(U) The Origins of the Country Desk Officer

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(U//FOUO) The Country Desk Officer (CDO) function is a mainstay in FAD and has been around for a very long time -- since 1980 to be accurate. In the formative years of foreign relations at NSA, i.e., the 1960s and 1970s, there were no CDOs, and in fact, there was no FAD, per se, or predecessor organization. Foreign relations was done as a staff function on the Director's personal staff by a small number of very senior civilians and military officers.

(U//FOUO) When the "Peace Treaty of 1976" transferred Third Party foreign relations responsibilities from CIA to NSA, NSA created a corporate organization by merging the Director's small staff with a foreign relations staff which existed in the Directorate for Operations (DO). Thus, the NSA Office of Foreign Relations, Q3, came to be, and it took a special moment to create the CDO function.

(U//FOUO) The newly selected Director of Foreign Relations was having the formative organizational meeting with the Deputy Director for Operations and the Deputy Director for Plans and Policy to establish missions and functions of Q3, and a question arose regarding what to call the staff officers responsible for the foreign relations partnerships. A discussion before the meeting among Q3 officers and their T242 (now DP3) counterparts elicited an idea that the function should be named Third Party Action Officers (TPAO) since that seemingly captured the job duties. In addition to the acronym TPAO being a bit off-putting, the Q3 officers had a better idea -- Country Desk Officer in the model of the State Department, i.e., all things to all people for that country. When the CDO idea was surfaced at the meeting with the seniors, there was no discussion. CDO was immediately adopted and has withstood the test of time.

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